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A M U S E M E N T.

A P O E T I C A L E S S A Y.

B Y

HENRY JAMES PYE, Esq.

THE TOILING PLEASURE SICKENS INTO PAIN.

GOLDSMITH.

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A M U S E M E N T.

A P O E T I C A L E S S A Y.

BY gay AMUSEMENT's soul-subduing power
To chear the mournful or the vacant hour,
In fancy's freakful gambols to delight,
Or wage with active limbs the mimic fight,
In earlier times, to breasts mature unknown,
Were cares of playful infancy alone ;
Nor did soft dissipation's art assuage
The toils of manhood, or the pains of age.

Not

Not from mankind alone these rules we draw,
Oft warp'd by prejudice from nature's law :
But brutes, who with unbias'd step pursue
The eternal canons they from instinct drew,
Confirm beyond a doubt this striking truth,
That sports are native attributes of youth. -
The lamb frisks wanton o'er the dewy ground,
The kitten hunts its tail in fruitless round ;
But o'er the down the ewes all pensive stray,
And grave grimalkin silent waits her prey,
Save when maternal fondness bids her share
The frolick pastimes of her youthful care.
Even so, ere social compact bids arise
Unnumber'd wants, and every want supplies,

Of childhood's joys no evanescent trace
Delights man's fullen solitary race ;
For, if his eager footstep haunt the wood,
He urges not the chace for sport but food ;~
Fierce as the hungry pard, with ravening haste,
Joyless and fell, he prowls the gloomy waste.
And if perchance in polish'd times we find
Pleasure more inmate of the female mind,~
Say what forbids our serious thought to draw
The smiling preference from nature's law,~
And view the mother's fondness that beguil'd ~
By kindred sports the sorrows of her child ?
Far, far from me be that malignant train,
Who scowl severe on pleasure's silken reign ;

Oft may her magic touch with sportive power
 Clear the dull languor of the tedious hour;
 For hours there are, when the o'er-labor'd sense
 Shrinks from the serious toil or thought intense.
 Oft to AMUSEMENT's visionary sway
 The real ills that poison life give way.
 In LYDIA's * plains, so tells the enchanting page -
 Of Hist'ry's aweful fire the CARIAN sage,
 In LYDIA's plains, what time with wasting hand
 Remorseless famine ravaged all the land,
 And the starv'd native on PACTOLUS' shore
 Ey'd the shrunk wave and curs'd the useless ore,
 By sports of art inventive fancy fought
 To turn from pinching want the tortur'd thought;

* See Herodotus, l. i. ch. 94.

Their

Their fascinating power the mind engag'd,

And hunger for a while unheeded rag'd.

How will AMUSEMENT's foes delight to trace

The dreary leisure of the savage race,

Or with imagination's eye pervade

The lonesome refuge of the INDIAN's shade,

When all the labors of the chace are o'er,

Hunger appeas'd, and sleep can lull no more !

Or let them picture to their aching fight

The lengthen'd horrors of a polar night,

Where, till returning spring dissolves the snow,

No dawning light shall gild the mountain's brow,

Nor can the native ply his needful toil,

Chace the rough bear or turn the ungrateful soil;

Clearless and unemploy'd, condemn'd to wear

In listless apathy the wintry year.

When agriculture to the fertile plain

Lur'd from the barren waste the improving swain,

Soon partial property, with selfish plan,

Her favorites cull'd, and sort'd man from man.

Then lusty labor bade the harvest rise

To fate the lazy owner's pamper'd eyes;

Who, deeming useful toil beneath his care,

Pass'd all his hours in indolence and war,

Or sought in peace by dangerous sports to gain

A mimic semblance of the martial plain,

Rov'd 'mid the forest haunts with wild delight,

And wag'd with beasts of prey the unequal fight,

Or

Or with his fellow warriors joy'd to wield
In friendly strife the weapons of the field,
In sportive exercise the javelin threw,
Pois'd the long lance, or bent the twanging yew.
Hence GRECIA's chiefs the prize triumphant bore
From PISA's groves or Isthmus' wave-worn shore,
While garlands of eternal fame inspire
The kindling raptures of a PINDAR'S lyre,—
Hence in the tournament the mail-clad knight
Provok'd his peers to dare the listed fight,
Urg'd his barb'd courser to the swift career,
And broke in beauty's cause the ashen spear,
While to the warbling harp's responsive string,
Applauding bards the victor's triumph sing,

Nor was the humbler swain, who till'd the ground;
 Condemn'd to labor's unremitting round ;
 For, when the plenteous produce of the soil
 Stor'd in full garners pays his annual toil,
 Or when their fleecy weight his flocks resign,
 Or laughing autumn swells the purple vine,
 As pious cares his grateful mind employ,
 * He consecrates the hallow'd hours to joy ;
 Stretch'd on the turf the blazing hearth around,
 While by the talking eld the bowl is crown'd,

* *Ipse dies agitat festos, fususque per herbam
 Ignis ubi in medio, & socii cratera coronant
 Te libans Lenæe, vocat pectorisque magistris
 Velocis jaculi certamina ponit in ulmo
 Corporaque agresti nudat prædura palestræ.*

VIRGIL.

With

With sinewy limbs the rustic youth contend,
 Or to the mark the unerring javelin send,/

And from the village maid's approving eyes
 The jocund victor gains the fairest prize.

When opulence assum'd his golden reign,—
 With luxury and science in his train,
 And beauty, man's fastidious empire o'er,—
 Join'd in the scenes she only judg'd before,
 The vacant hours to gentler toils invite,—
 Than the rude image of the bleeding fight;
 Each coarse delight to softer joy gives place,
 And sports of labor yield to sports of grace.—
 Responsive to the lyre's inspiring sound,
 In mingled measure now they beat the ground,

Now on the chequer'd field with silent care,
 Attentive wage the sedentary war.
 Even manlier exercise the arts despoil
 Of half its danger, and of half its toil :
 No more the knight, in shining armour dress'd,
 Opposes to the pointed lance his breast ;
 Scarce does the skilful fencer's bosom feel
 The pliant pressure of the * bated steel ;
 For the stupendous quoit or craggy stone,
 Afar with emulous contention thrown,
 Deliver'd with inferior force is seen
 The bowl flow-rolling o'er the shaven green ;

* — You may chuse
 A sword unbated. HAMLET.

i.e. not blunted, as foils are.

Or

Or else, defended from inclement skies,
The ball rebounding from the racket flies ;
Or o'er the cloth, impell'd by gentler skill,
The ivory orbs the net insidious fill.

Even in those rougher transports of the chace,
Where nature's genuine form we seem to trace,
And art appears unequal to supply
Assistance to the calls of luxury,
For the wild tenants of the wood and plain
Still their primæval character retain,
Still will their wiles the experienc'd hunter foil,
And still fatigue attend on cold and toil ;
Even in the forest-walks has polish'd care
Taught healthful sport a gentler form to wear.

Swoln opulence is not content to stray
In anxious search thro' many a tedious day,
Where constant hopes the eager thought employ,
And expectation doubles every joy :
But the wing'd tribe, by care domestic bred,
Watch'd with attention, with attention fed,
Where'er the sportsman treads in clouds arise,
Prevent his wish, and fate his dazzled eyes ;
And each redoubled shot with certain aim
Covers the ensanguin'd field with home-bred game—
Transporting joy ! to vulgar breasts unknown,
Save to the poult erer and cook alone ;
Who search the crowded coop with equal skill,
As sure to find, almost as sure to kill.

No

No more the courser with attentive eyes
 'Mid the rank grass and tangled stubble pries,
 Till, many an hour in watchful silence pass'd,
 A moment's frenzy pays his toil at last.

 No cheerful beagle now, at early dawn,
 Explores with tender nose the dewy lawn,
 Avows the recent path with carol sweet,
 And trails the listening leveret to her seat ;

 Stretch'd on the couch the lazy sportsmen lie,
 Till Sol ascending gilds the southern sky,
 And leave the hind, with mercenary care,
 To seek the refuge of the lurking hare *. /

Dulleſt

* This species of lazy luxury is at least as old as the time of Arrian; who says, " The most opulent and luxurious among the Gauls course in " this

Dullest of all pursuits, why mention here
 The chace inglorious of the stall-fed deer?
 When even that generous race who justly claim
 Toilsome pre-eminence of sylvan fame,
 Who joy to lay with sanguine vengeance low
 The sheepfold and the henyard's treacherous foe;
 Even they who us'd, ere morn's first opening light,
 To trace the skulking felon of the night,
 With slacken'd vigor now their sports delay,
 Till PHOEBUS pours the orient beams of day.
 Nor does the drag, evaporating soon
 Beneath the warmer influence of noon,
 " this manner :—They send out good hare-finders early in the morning to
 " those places where it is likely to find hares sitting, who send word if they
 " have found any, and what number; then they go out themselves and put
 " them up, and lay in the dogs, themselves following on horseback."

Frustrate their hopes ; for, bearing in their mind
That well-known adage, " Those that hide can find,"
Sure of success, the covert they explore,
For foxes turn'd adrift the night before.

But say, is this the pastime of the fields,
Where panting expectation rapture yields ?—
Coldly the certain victim we pursue,
And losing doubt we lose the transport too.

If such the texture luxury has thrown,
O'er scenes confin'd to ruder man alone,
What shall we find them when the gentler fair
Mix with the band and every pleasure share ?—
Not those bold dames who join the rustic train,
Chear the staunch hound, the fiery courser rein ;

E Or

Or those to point the feather'd shaft who know,

And joy "to bear, and draw the warrior bow."

O may BRITANNIA's nymphs such arts despise,

Content alone to conquer with their eyes !

For OMPHALE as ill the lion's spoil

Becomes, as HERCULES the distaff's toil ;

But such as haunt the seats of courtly fame,

Where female charms the first attention claim,

And their contending powers the arts employ

To ravish every sense with every joy.—

The splendid theatre's resplendent round, —

With pomp, with elegance, with beauty crown'd.—

Not that I mean whose homelier scenes invite

To tales of grief, of humour, of delight,

Where SHAKESPEAR's honied style entralls the ear,

Wakes the loud laugh, or draws the heart-felt tear—

SHAKESPEAR ! ador'd in these degenerate days,

To whom we hymns inscribe, and temples raise,

Worship his image, and neglect his plays.—

Ah ! who the evening's festal hours will quit

For scenes of tragic woe or comic wit ?—

Scenes of a purer polish must engage

The loose attention of a courtly age ;

Scenes where satiric point ne'er gives offence,

Or verse disturbs its placid stream with sense ;

Where from HESPERIAN fields the eunuch train.

Trill with soft voice the unimpassion'd strain,

In measur'd cadence while the dancers art

Wakes without words the feelings of the heart.

Delightful

Delightful joys ! of universal power,
Suited to every taste and every hour,
Since the loose drama no connexion ties,
And all may judge who trust their ears and eyes.—
See in majestic swell yon festive dome,
Like the PANTHEON of imperial ROME,
And where as many fabled forms unite,
Visions of bliss or demons of affright.
Or, sought in vernal hours, that ampler space
Where beauty's steps the eternal circle trace,
And midnight revelry delights her soul
With breezes redolent of tea and roll,
In fragrant steam while thro' the crowded room
The ARABIAN berry yields its rich perfume,

And

And 'mid the murmurs of the mingled throng
Unheeded music swells the flighted song ;
Or, Lent's delight, the ORATORIO dull, —
Of yawning connoisseurs and coxcombs full ;
When, plays profane deny'd, our ears explore
The pious freaks of ALEXANDER'S whore ;
The rout repeated with incessant call,
The formal concert, and the mirthleſs ball.——
Say is this joy ? — Yes, to the virgin's heart
First stung by potent love's resistless smart ;
Who 'mid the empty croud of silken beaux
Her glance on one distinguish'd fav'rite throws ;
Yes, to the insidious wretch whose guilty care
Hunts artleſs virtue into vice's snare,

F

Whose

Whose every thought and action is address'd
 To wound a parent's or a husband's breast,
 Or that more gross tho' less pernicious tribe
 Who venal beauty's joyless favors bribe ;
 Yes, to the rural nymph of distant plains
 Who three sweet months of charming LONDON gains ;
 Yes, to the youth escap'd from smoke and trade
 To shew the western town his stol'n cockade :—
 To these, where passion gently soothes the breast,
 Or vice affords their joys a guilty zest ;
 Or novelty, fair pleasure's youthful queen,
 Gives fresh allurements to each splendid scene,
 To these, in fancy's varying mirror shown,
 AMUSEMENT charms with beauties not its own.—

To all the rest, with listless mind who fly [
To midnight crouds from languor's leaden eye,
To the full circle run from home-felt care,
Then start to meet the ghastly spectre there,
The night of revel wears as dull away
As to th' o'erlabor'd hind the tedious day.—
Of these our joys how transient then the state,
Since still disgust must on possefson wait !
Pleasure we all pursue with eager pace,
Yet lose the quarry when we lose the chace ;
Thro' fancy's medium when our view we bend,
Ten thousand charms the ideal form attend ;
Shewn plainly to our disappointed eyes
The enchantment breaks, and every beauty flies.—

The

The sprightly boy who draws in shadowy plan
 The future pleasures of the envied man,
 His father's hounds in all his brothers views,
 And warm a visionary fox pursues ;
 Or else, like HECAT', mounted on a broom
 His fancied racer spurs around the room ;
 Tho' airy phantoms then his mind employ,
 Yet then he feels more true substantial joy
 Than all the sports of ripen'd age shall gain
 From MEYNELL's hunt, or fam'd NEWMARKET's plain.
 Yet not alone to rich AUGUSTA's towers,
 A nation's wealth where dissipation showers ;
 Or BLADUD's walls, in rising splendor dress'd,
 Proud of the healing fount, and frequent guest ;

Or

Or those unnumber'd shores where fashion laves

Her jaded limbs in ocean's briny waves ;—

Not to these seats, for courtly haunts design'd,

Is pleasure's universal reign confin'd :

BRITANNIA scarcely owns a town so small

As not to boast its periodic ball,

Where, when full-orb'd, Diana pours her light,

And gilds the darkness of the wintry night,

The village beaux and belles their hours employ —

In the full swing of fashionable joy :—

Afide the unfinish'd handkerchief is thrown,

And the fair ~~tempestress~~ now adjusts her own ;

The apothecary quits the unpounded pill,

Even the attorney drops his venal quill,

G

And,

And, as his eyes the sprightly dance behold,
Forgets to drain the widow's purse of gold.—
To these 'tis joy.—But even the courtly train,
Anxious the dregs of pleasure's bowl to drain,
When, fully sated with each splendid show
That elegance and grandeur can bestow,
To rural solitude they fly, will there
This faint reflection of amusement share.
When from SOUTHAMPTON's or from BRIGHTON's
shore,
Which charm'd when LONDON's revelry was o'er,
The fading beauty of autumnal hours,
Recalls the sportsman to his native bowers,

To tell his neighbours all the toils of state,
Recount of public cares the enormous weight, }
And how he flumber'd thro' the long debate ;

His wife and daughters quit the Gothic hall
To taste the raptures of the rustic ball. —

The high-born misses, insolent and vain,
Scorn while they mingle with the homely train,
Still at the top, in spite of order, stand,
And hardly touch a mean plebeian hand ;

While madam, eager 'mid the card-room's strife,
Insults the lawyer's and the curate's wife,
Now smiles contemptuous, now with anger burns,
And domineers and scolds, and cheats by turns ;

Pleas'd on the village gentry to retort
Slights she receives from dutchesses at court.

But

But what are these, by starts alone pursu'd,
These partial errors of the moon?—when view'd
By that assemblage of each rustic grace,
That CYNOSURE of joy, a county race; —
Where, with fatigue and dulness in her train,
Provincial pleasure holds her proudest reign?
O that my MUSE in equal verse could tell
Each varied object which she knows so well!—
The crowded ordinary's loud repast,
The frequent bumper swallow'd down in haste,
The rattling carriage driven with drunken speed,
The bawling hawker, and the restive steed,
The proffer'd bet with interjection strong,
And the shrill squallings of the female throng;

The

The sounding hoof, the whip's coercive sound,
As the fleet coursers stretch along the ground,
When the repeated oath and menace loud
Warn from the listed course the pressing croud ;
The various horrors of the narrow lane,
As the promiscuous heaps the town regain,
Where coaches, waggons, horsemen, footmen, all
Rush eager to the alehouse, or the ball ;
The fragrant toilette of the crowded room,
The stables and the kitchen's mix'd perfume ;
The minuet's sober note till midnight drawn,
The gayer dance beyond the hour of dawn,
While the vex'd gamester at his rubber hears
The eternal tune still droning in his ears ;

The supper, circling toast, and choral lay,
Protracted far into the solid day ;
The interrupted sleep, till noon again
Rouse to the early feast the drowsy train,
And to the bev'rage of the Indian weed
The smoking haunch and mantling bowl succeed.—
Is this Amusement ?—Ask the county knight,
Press'd into pleasure in his own despight,
Who, quitting all the placid joys of home
For seven months session in ST. STEPHEN'S dome,
Compell'd each office of fatigue to share,
And every quarter fill the QUORUM's chair,
Must all these mingled forms of mirth partake,
Drink, dance, and gamble for his country's sake ;

Ask him if days in dull committees spent,
Or sleepless nights to oratory lent,
Tho' litigation waste the morning's hours,
Or fancy crown the eve with eastern flowers ;
Ask him if months that toils like these employ,
Are half so hard as this oppressive joy.

Yet to the village sons who throng the ground,
Sent forth in numbers from each cottage round,
Who leave awhile untill'd the fertile soil,
And snatch a respite from diurnal toil,
These varied sports a real joy afford,
No art can give the pleasure-fated lord.

Behold the transports of yon festive scene,
Where the wide country on the tented green

Its

Its inmates pours, impatient all to share
The expected pleasures of the annual fair!—\
See to the amorous youth and village maid
The pedlar's silken treasury display'd ;
The liquorish boy the yellow simnel eyes,
The champion's cudgel wins the envied prize ;
The martial trumpet calls the gazers in
Where lions roar, or fierce hyenas grin.—
Responsive to the tabor's sprightly sound
Behold the jingling morrice beat the ground,
The neighing courser sleek and trick'd for sale,
Grains in his paunch and ginger in his tail ;
The dwarf and giant painted to the life,
The spirit-stirring drum, and shrill-ton'd fife,

Prelusive

Prelusive to the warlike speech that charms

The kindling heroes of the plain to arms.—

Here bliss unfeign'd in every eye we trace,

Here heart-felt mirth illumines every face,

For pleasure here has never learn'd to cloy,

But days of toil enliven hours of joy.

Joy, how unlike its unsubstantial shade

Which faintly haunts the midnight masquerade,

Where the distorted vizard ill conceals

The deep ennui each languid bosom feels,

And, but for shame, each vot'ry of delight,

Fatigued with all the nonsense of the night,

Would, like 'SQUIRE RICHARD, seek with fated eye

Wrestling and backsword for variety.

Nor do I fable—worn with constant care
 Of fev'rish riot and fantastic glare,
 From splendid luxury our youth resort
 To all the roughness of barbarian sport,
 And leave each softer elegance of town
 To share the pastime of the rustic clown ;
 Croud to behold, on the forbidden stage,
 CHRISTIAN and JEW in bloody fight engage,
 Amusement in a fractur'd shoulder spy,
 And gaze with rapture on a batter'd eye.
 Nor this alone : reflection's form to shun
 To scenes of busineſs indolence will run.
 Fatigu'd and cloy'd, of rest impatient still,
 What crouds the ſenate's loaded gall'ry fill !

From SIDDONS' tears and JORDAN's smile they fly
To long harangues, impell'd by novelty ;
As pleas'd when dulness lulls, with cadence deep,
Knights, citizens, and burghesses to sleep,
As when, aroused in freedom's hallow'd cause,
Unfullied praise the Son of CHATHAM draws,
And eloquence, with more than GRECIAN art,
Decks the pure dictates of a CATO's heart.
Of BRITISH politics, ah selfish pride !
Which joys like these to female ears deny'd ;
Till beauty's champion, with attentive care,
Turn'd out a NABOB to divert the fair,
And now they hear his chosen band dispense
The cream of opposition eloquence.

But

But say, what fashionable form appears,
Whose vacant brow reflection's aspect wears ?
Who rolls the eye with senfelefs sapience full,
In trifles wise, and venerably dull ?—
I know him well.—In midnight fumes enclos'd
Of the VIRGINIAN weed, while FOLLY doz'd,
DULNESS advanc'd with Aldermannic tread
In solemn silence to the ideot's bed,
And in the produce of the stol'n embrace
The father's sense, and mother's wit we trace :
Both with a parent's love their offspring kiss'd,
Prefag'd his future fame, and call'd him WHIST.\
Far from the courtly race, in private bred,
With rural swains his early youth he led,

The

The clearing solace, by the wintry fire,
Of the fat parson or the drunken squire ;
Till, when each livelier game could charm no more,
And dear QUADRILLE itself became a bore,
Capricious taste, with novel nonsense fraught,
To town this scientific stranger brought,
Taught him the courtly circle's smile to share,
Till fashion bade him reign sole monarch there.
Struck with amaze, his sprightlier rivals fly
The chilling torpor of his gorgon eye :
SPADILLE no longer rears his fable shield,
PAM drops his halberd and forsakes the field.—
See where around the silent vot'ries fit,
To radiant beauty blind, and deaf to wit ;

Each vacant eye appears with wisdom fraught,

Each solemn blockhead looks as if he thought.

Here coward insolence insults the bold,

And selfish av'rice boasts his lust of gold ;

Ill-temper vents her spleen without offence,

And pompous dulness triumphs over sense.

Should some intrusive infant in the room

Disturb with jocund voice the general gloom,

The parent's eye, with short-liv'd frenzy wild,

Reproves the frolic of his wiser child.—

O strange extreme of fancy's wayward mood !

Distemper'd pleasure's sickly change of food,

Which, loathing every taste of known delight,

Provokes with trash her blunted appetite.—

Yet,

Yet, if this stretch of studious thought be joy,
 Let schemes of use the anxious mind employ,
 Turn WINGATE's solid pages, or explore
 The untried depth of mathematic lore ;
 Or else with HERSCHELL's telescopic eye
 Trace new-found planets thro' the vaulted sky ;
 * Or, if the cold blood curdling round the heart,
 Deny of science this sublimer part,
 On politics awake the learn'd debate,
 For every BRITON knows to mend the state ;
 Nor strive in serious trifles to excel,
 Which childhood even might blush to know too
 well.

* *Sin has ne possim naturæ accedere partes
 Frigidus obsteterit circum præcordia sanguis.*

VIRGIL.

Far

Far from fantastic fashion's giddy range,
 Far from the dulness of fastidious change,
 Pleasure, by fancy's airy fingers dress'd,
 Object of every wish in every breast,
 Holds her abode ; nor shall o'erweening pride
 Her roseate smiles in gloomy accent chide.—
 O may I oft partake her genial hour,
 Join in her train, and bless her friendly power ;
 Oft taste the pure unsullied scenes of joy,
 Where wit and beauty mingled charms employ ;
 The free libation of the temperate bowl,
 “ The feast of reason, and the flow of soul ; ”
 The theatre, where truth, by genius dight,
 Holds her broad mirror to the conscious sight ;

The heart-felt thrilling of the warbled lay,
The dancing measures of the young and gay ;
The manlier sports, where hope, by doubt repress'd,
With expectation fires the panting breast,
And languor on the upland brow inhales
New health and vigor from the morning gales ;
The evening walk, when spring adorns the glades,
Or summer's foliage all the forest shades ;
The joyous hours, when winter bids retire
To the warm comfort of the social fire ;
The honest laugh, which care's stern brow unbends ;
The brilliant jest, which shines but ne'er offends ;
The tender strain, the hymn to BACCHUS roar'd
In choral transport round the festive board ;

The catch, which oft in vain the songsters try,
 While one is still too low, and one too high,
 Till, after many a fruitless effort pass'd,
 The harmonious discord is produc'd at last ;
 Even cards, if cards can e'er the mind engage,
 Divested quite of avarice and rage,
 Even cards some drowsy interval may clear,
 But ne'er in wisdom's borrow'd robe appear ;—
 And, only source of pleasure's keenest zest,
 May some pursuit still animate the breast ;
 From whence, returning to the sportful hour,
 AMUSEMENT charms with renovated power.
 For let the MUSE, in her concluding strain,
 This truth impart to pleasure's votive train :—

Urg'd to excess all human bliss must cloy,
And joy perpetual ceases to be joy.

F I N I S.

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